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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Fried Chicken for the Fourth

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Kenneth Gapen, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations, Thursday, July 2, 1936.

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MR. GAPEN: Now, I'm happy to announce, especially to the women who are part of the Farm and Home Hour today, that Ruth Van Deman is back again after a two week's absence. Are you ready to pick it up, Miss Van Deman?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Any time you say!

MR. GAPEN: Well, I'd say this is just about the psychological moment to fix up a Fourth of July picnic for us.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Or a dinner?

MR. GAPEN: Yes, a dinner if you prefer, so long as you make it a fried chicken dinner. You know nothing else goes on the Fourth of July.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Oh that depends on what part of the country you come from. I always supposed fried chicken and Fourth of July were synonymous until I happened to be in Boston one year. Up there I found that fresh salmon and green peas were the correct thing to eat on the Fourth.

MR. GAPEN: Well, I won't undertake to change the ways of the Bostonians. I'm sure that fresh salmon and green peas are very good eating, but I still stick to fried chicken. But why is it, Miss Van Deman, that some fried chicken is so much better than other. Sometimes it's tender and juicy and sometimes it's so stringy and tough you have to almost scrape it off the bone. Does the cooking make all that difference?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, not at all. No cook can make perfect fried chicken out of a thin scrawny bird. A good frying chicken should weigh 2-1/2 to 3-1/2 pounds, that is with the head and feet on and before it's drawn. It will lose about a fourth of that when it's dressed ready to cook. And it should be plump - well-fleshed as the experts say, with bits of fat showing through the skin. If it's been milk-fed, that is finished off on the special fattening ration that lots of the poultrymen use now, then the flesh will be light-colored and fine-grained.

MR. GAPEN: All right, if I guaranteed to find a plump, fat young frier like that, then how would you proceed?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, after the chicken is all cleaned and cut up and washed and drained dry, and salted and peppered and floured, I'd get out a good old heavy iron skillet or one of these shiny newer-style chicken friers. To fry chicken right, you need a heavy metal utensil - one that holds the heat and distributes it evenly, and one large enough to hold the pieces of

chicken without overcrowding. A little thin pan is no good for frying chicken.

MR. GAPEN: O. K. We have the chicken and the skillet. What's next?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Next is the fat - plenty of sweet-flavored cooking fat, part of it butter if you can spare it, enough to cover the pan about half an inch deep. And have the fat hot, but not hot enough to smoke when you put the chicken in.

MR. GAPEN: Do you just dump the chicken all in at once?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, you put the larger thicker pieces in first - the drumsticks and the second joints, and the thick breast cuts. They need a little longer cooking than the more bony pieces.

Just as soon as the chicken has browned lightly, turn it over, and when it begins to brown on that side, lower the heat or slide the skillet toward the back of the stove, so the chicken can finish cooking at moderate temperature. That's the way to keep the juice in chicken and cook it evenly clear to the bone - to use moderate heat for the last part of the time.

MR. GAPEN: Do you cover the skillet?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, it's a good idea, too, to cover the skillet partly, to keep the grease from spattering and to let the steam help to soften the muscles around the joints.

As soon as the chicken is brown and tender, take it out and let it drain on absorbent paper, and keep it hot while you make the gravy. Where so many chicken cooks go wrong is in frying the chicken too long and too hard. It's the same with any protein food, heat beyond a certain point toughens it and drives the juice right out.

MR. GAPEN: Ah, I see that's where you apply science. Now, how do you keep the lumps out of the gravy - is that also applied science?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, science and skill. Any experienced gravy maker will tell you that to make a smooth creamy mixture, you stir flour right into the fat in the skillet - about a level tablespoon of flour for each tablespoon of fat. And after you blend the fat and flour thoroughly, then you add the liquid cold, and stir vigorously with the bowl of the spoon until the gravy bubbles up and is smooth. If you add the liquid hot, then you make lumps that you can't ever cook out or rub out; you have to strain them out and waste that much gravy.

MR. GAPEN: Let there be no waste of good chicken gravy!

Well, Miss Van Deman, we thank you for this very plain and practical talk on how to fry chicken to a golden brown, juicy perfection. You've almost got me to the point of frying my own for the Fourth of July.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, you said you wanted a picnic.

MR. GAPEN: That would be a picnic! Well, we'll be looking for you next week, Miss Van Deman.